# (U) History Today - 27 July 2010

Run Date: 07/27/2010



(U) Although war in Europe began officially when Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, fighting in western Europe did not begin until May, when the German military struck into France.

(U) The German Army quickly bypassed French fixed fortifications, and drove a British expeditionary force back into the sea at Dunkirk.

(U) A few days later, the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini announced his intention to declare war on France in conjunction with his German ally.

(U) At this point, the Canadian Telegraph Censorship Office made a significant contribution to the early war effort. The office was able to give the British a complete order-of-battle listing of Italian divisions and their sub-units.

(U) The order-of-battle information came from an unlikely source, intercepted plain-text telegrams.

(U) In the prewar period, Mussolini had been anxious to obtain hard currency that could be used to support the Italian military buildup. His government concocted a scheme in which Italians living in North America would deposit dollars in an Italian account in an American bank in the name of a beneficiary in Italy. The beneficiary would then receive the equivalent in lire; the government of Italy would take a cut from the original deposit, profiting from the difference in the exchange rate between "hard" and "soft" money. This scheme had great appeal to Italian expatriates who wanted to send money to relatives in the homeland.

(U) The banks, however, insisted on full names and addresses of the beneficiaries, including those who were located with military units.

(U) The Canadian censorship office monitored these plain-text communications and performed sophisticated traffic analysis on them. In addition to order-of-battle data, the material indicated the heavy presence of Italian units in the border regions near Yugoslavia, suggesting an invasion was imminent.

(U) According to a history of Canadian intelligence, this information gave the British military a tremendous advantage during its campaign against the Italian army in North Africa and Ethiopia.

(U) Like to blog? Want to discuss historical topics with interested -- and interesting -- folks? Visit the Center for Cryptologic History's blog, "History Rocks." (go history rocks)

(U) Larger view of photo

(U) Have a question or comment on "History Today"? Contact us at DL cch or cch@nsa